

Delaware Small Business Persons of the Year

Frank Masley, CEO
Donna Masley, President
Masley Enterprises, Inc.
2207 Concord Pike, PMB 190
Wilmington, DE 19803
Factory at 41 Germay Drive
(302) 427-9885
Fax (302) 427-0813
fmasley@militarygloves.com
www.militarygloves.com

Olympian Achieves Manufacturing Success, Supports our Troops

When Frank Masley left his job at W.L. Gore & Associates to start Masley Enterprises, a Wilmington-based glove manufacturing business, many people thought he was crazy. As a three-time Olympian in the sport of Luge, it wasn't the first time he was told that.

To understand Masley's business drive, one has to look no further than his pursuit of the Olympic dream. He became fascinated by luge racing after watching the 1976 Olympics and decided he would be on the next Olympic team. It was an impossible dream for a young man from Delaware who had never been on a luge sled. Not only did he make the Olympic team in 1980, but he also represented the United States in 1984 and 1988 and carried the American flag in the opening ceremonies of the Sarajevo Olympics.

Masley learned four main lessons from his Olympic experience: Do something fun and worthwhile, give your best effort, stay away from negative influences and keep the faith—rewards will follow. Those same values serve him well as a small business owner.

In July 2000, he launched Masley Enterprises with the dream of running a glove-making business. He started small, working as a consultant to other manufacturers and eventually moving into manufacturing using subcontractors. Today Masley Enterprises has annual sales of \$2.9 million and manufactures its own products with 40 employees.

Over the years American glove manufacturing has lost out to foreign competition and lower labor costs. Masley knew he needed to develop an innovative product to compete in a niche market.

The federal Berry Amendment requires that gloves and other clothing for military personnel be made in the U.S. Masley had his niche.

After extensive research and development Masley designed an innovative product line. The Masley gloves are less bulky and more flexible than typical military gloves. This provides protection for American soldiers without restricting their movement.

A number of government contracts followed, including several key orders from the General Services Administration (GSA) and the U.S. Army. In 2005, Masley Enterprises received a \$770,000 SBA 7(a) guaranteed loan through Wilmington Trust to support a \$1.3 million Army contract. A major contract supplying gloves for soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan followed in 2009. Once again the company turned to the SBA and Wilmington Trust to finance a \$1.6 million SBA 7(a) loan under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The 90 percent SBA guarantee positioned the bank to approve the loan, while saving the business \$55,000 due to a temporary reduction of SBA loan fees under ARRA.

Upon winning the first major contract, Donna Masley assumed a greater role in the company as its human resources and efficiency expert. This opened the door for the company to enhance its capabilities with an investment in employee training and development.

Donna continues to run the business along side of Frank. She also maintains her 25 year Registered Nurse position at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia as a veteran ICU nurse. Her employment with CHOP has maintained Masleys' finances through the difficult years of growth.

Overcoming adversity became so common over the years that it only toughened their resolve to succeed. When a large competitor copied the company's Fuel Handler Glove design and was awarded a large government contract, the Masleys protested and eventually won, but the lengthy process created a huge financial burden. In 2007 and 2008, the national economic downturn forced the company to downsize from 20 employees to five. The recent U.S. Army contract and the SBA loan under the Recovery Act positioned it to get back on track and expand to the current 40 employees, a number of whom were re-hired from the layoff.

One of the reasons for the Masleys' success is their willingness to access every available small business resource. In addition to the SBA financing, they received counseling and training from the Small Business Development Center, the Procurement Technical Assistance Center and the Delaware Manufacturing Extension Partnership. Add to that a Delaware Economic Development Office grant under its Blue Collar Training Fund to support its workforce development needs.

The Masleys are committed to creating job opportunities by moving individuals from challenging backgrounds into gainful employment. They also utilize prison to work, welfare to work and vocation rehabilitation programs and give back by employing several veterans.

The Masleys' community involvement is extensive, ranging from being a Girl Scout leader and a grade school coach to serving on the boards of the Delaware Small Business Development Center and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. And of course Frank finds time to give back as the chairman of the U.S. Luge National Team Committee.